



SUPER MARIO MAKERS

We talk with Shigeru Miyamoto, Chris Pratt, and more to learn about the process of bringing Nintendo's beloved mascot back to the silver screen with *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*. BY BRIAN TOLLA

In 1993, when 11-year-old Seth Rogen left the theater after seeing *Super Mario Bros.* starring Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo, and Dennis Hopper, he did so with a new perspective on what movies can be. Unfortunately, this worldview-changing experience probably isn't what the filmmakers were hoping for.

"I grew up with Mario Bros.; I was hugely into video games when I was young," the actor says. "As an 11-year-old, seeing that first Mario Bros. movie was a truly disappointing experience to me [...] I think it was the movie that showed me movies could be bad, which didn't even occur to me before that."

Rogen's experience is not unique: many young moviegoers left the theater in 1993 feeling burned by the licensed adaptation. While that film has generated a cult following in the three decades since, fans have yearned for a more faithful adaptation featuring the world and characters of Nintendo's flagship franchise.

"I think the people who made [the 1993 movie] put a lot of work into it, but I think the difference is that the movie that was made 30 years ago, we licensed the Mario IP and they made the movie," Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto says. "This time, we were looking to get into movies and do the movie production ourselves instead of licensing it."

Fast forward to the early 2010s, and Nintendo was ready to bring its franchises back to movie theaters. Miyamoto talked with Illumination CEO Chris Meledandri, and they discovered their creative processes were similar. Because of that, Nintendo

partnered with Illumination to create a brand-new movie starring Mario and his friends.

Directors Aaron Horvath and Michael Jelenic used experiences like Rogen's as a guiding experience for the creation of 2023's *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*. "I wanted to make the movie that I wanted to see when I was a kid," Horvath says. "If there were fans like us who were making movies back then, this is the movie that they would have made."

The two directors credit having people who grew up with games in leadership roles as to why video game adaptations are of much higher quality in recent years. But that's not the only reason. "I think in the past, there was maybe a cynical approach to adapting it," Jelenic says. "People making this stuff understood it was popular but didn't understand why it was popular. The people who are making it now, they had an emotional experience [coming from] a less cynical place. This stuff is meaningful to us."

That investment is what ultimately drew Rogen to the role of Donkey Kong in the film. In talking with actors like Chris Pratt and Charlie Day, it's clear the franchise is also important to them. "It's nice to be a part of the collaborative team that is responsible for being so mindful and careful about these characters that people do care so much about," Pratt says. "You want to get it right. For me, I wouldn't want them to screw it up, and the best way for me to make sure they don't screw it up is to jump in and be a part of it."

One big way Nintendo wanted to remain faithful was by sticking solely to Mario references rather



FINDING THEIR VOICES

we asked three of the Super Mario Bros. movie stars how they took on the challenge they faced in the film. Here are their responses.



Chris Pratt Mario

It really all just comes down to story. This is a surprising realization. Video games, they tell a story in a way that you're allowed to be there, firsthand, and there are the systems to allow you to go on these quests. That's what it's been for 30 years. But here, we're really crafting a story. So the script and the story we're going to tell us a lot about who these characters need to be. What makes Mario Mario? What makes Luigi Luigi? How do they separate? What's their relationship? What is the relationship with their parents? What's the relationship with their family? What are the circumstances of their lives that are calling them on their quest? Once you know all those things, that kind of makes it easy.

Charlie Day Luigi

Was approach it from a character, which is slightly different from, "Hey, what's the funniest way to say 'It's a me!'?" Instead you're saying, "Why am I saying 'It's a me!' to my brother? What do I care about? What am I looking for in this moment?" You start from that place, and then you build out.



Seth Rogen Donkey Kong

I only do one voice, and it's my dad, so it was not a hard process.



(then introducing new elements just for the purpose of the film. "I think it's natural that there's a tendency or desire to create something new—a new character specifically for this," Miyamoto says. "There's plenty of assets and content in the Mario world that we can use. So, let's start there, and let's see what we can use there. We realized that after putting all of that into the movie that there's so much that the Mario world has that we still have leftovers that we weren't able to use."

The Super Mario Bros. Movie delivers an experience way closer to the source material, showing clear respect and love for the games. The references include several visual nods to Mario and Nintendo's past, dating all the way back to the main character's origins as Jumpman, but perhaps permeating more throughout the experience are the audio references, which are thanks to composer Brian Tyler and longtime Nintendo composer Koichi Kondo.

Kondo credits Tyler for finding the right place to fit the music and audio cues into the film, but Kondo was far from hands-off. "What we did on my end was look at different scenes from the movie and made up a list of music that I thought would enhance them," he says. "Brian took the game music that we had shared with him—the game music that he was aware of—and added it to the right places throughout the movie scene to enhance the experience for the audience."

While in these various discussions, the actors, directors, and Nintendo Japan/US all came across a genuine pride of what they're created. Had something like this movie been what people like Seth Rogen saw in 1993, it's impossible to say how the trajectory of video game movies would have changed in the subsequent 30 years. At least now, with adaptations like Netflix's Castlevania, HBO's The Last of Us series, and Nintendo's return to the cinema, it finally feels like we're on the right track. •

The Super Mario Bros. Movie is in theaters now. For our full review and the unabridged version of these interviews, head to [Gamespot.com](https://www.gamespot.com).

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